

Marsh Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

Adopted by vote of June 13, 2005

Guidelines for Infill Construction and Substantial Additions or Alterations

Introduction:

Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should follow the district's historic precedent and conserve the modest character of the Marsh's mid to late 19th century workers' housing and the overall simplicity of its traditional wood-frame vernacular architecture.

Infill construction means 1) the construction of additional free-standing dwelling unit(s) on premises where an existing building will be retained or 2) the construction of one or more new dwelling units on premises where the Commission has issued a Certificate of Appropriateness or Hardship for the demolition of an existing building.

Substantial additions or alterations means 1) the construction of additional dwelling unit(s) attached to or within an existing building or 2) the enlargement of an existing building, either of which would result in a 25% or greater increase in the footprint, lot coverage, floor area, or height of the existing building.

Infill construction and substantial additions should strive to conserve views from the public way through yards and between houses, allow for architectural diversity, enhance landscape amenities, and maintain low fences. Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should defer to traditional street patterns and pedestrian activity.

Zoning Compliance and Appropriateness:

Construction, additions and alterations that satisfy the applicable zoning do not necessarily satisfy the standard of appropriateness under the terms of these guidelines or the Marsh NCD order. Ideally, a proposal for infill construction or substantial addition or alteration should comply both with the existing zoning and with the terms of the Marsh NCD order and these guidelines. Applicants are strongly encouraged to pursue proposals that either meet or fall below the applicable dimensional requirements of the zone in which the premises are located.

Applicants should be aware that an application for a proposal that is "as-of-right" by zoning may nonetheless not meet the Commission's standard of appropriateness and that the Commission "may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and setback requirements in addition to those required by applicable provision of the zoning ordinance." (ch. 2.78.220, Cambridge City Code) The Commission is authorized to make such requirements only for "the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance or distinctive character of the . . . neighborhood conservation district." (ch. 2.7.8.220)

The city's zoning code is a legal framework based on a topic of state statute (ch. 40A MGL) that is separate and distinct from neighborhood conservation regulation. It is a

product of substantial due process and sets city policy on development standards. While the Commission may recommend dimensional and setback requirements that are at variance from the requirements of the zoning ordinance, its determinations will not require an unwilling applicant to obtain relief from the applicable provisions of the zoning ordinance.

Guidelines:

A. Where infill construction is proposed, the additional unit(s) should be contained in structure(s) that are subordinate to the existing house. The Commission will use the following characteristics in conjunction with B-D below as guidelines to make a determination of appropriate subordination in infill applications. Infill construction should have the following characteristics:

1. a footprint that is generally 25% smaller than the existing house;
2. overall height that is generally 5' lower than the existing house; and
3. exterior treatment that is as simple as the existing house and not inappropriate to it.

Changes made within the five years preceding an application for infill construction or substantial addition or alteration, even if made pursuant to a prior Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, will generally be considered to be changes to "the existing house."

B. Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should not entirely block existing layered views from the public way through yards and between houses. Infill construction and substantial additions or alterations should be placed to preserve some significant portion of existing layered views from the public way or to create alternative new views from the public way through yards and between houses.

C. Infill construction or substantial additions or alterations should not significantly diminish light to existing neighboring properties by casting large new shadows beyond the applicant's property line. New shadows should fall mainly on the applicant's property.

D. The Marsh NCD order expresses concern about the effect of new construction on the water table and subsoil conditions. Applications for infill construction and substantial additions or alterations that involve significant excavation will not be considered complete without a soils report and/or drainage plan and calculations from a civil engineer.